

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:                      FATIH AKIN'S LOVE, DEATH, AND THE  
DEVIL TRILOGY: A TRIAD OF CROSS-  
CULTURAL TALES

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Tracing Fatih Akin's directorial oeuvre, this thesis focuses on Akin's films *Gegen die Wand* (Head-On, 2004), *Auf der anderen Seite* (The Edge of Heaven, 2007), and *The Cut* (2014), which comprise the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy. Emphasizing the tropes of mobility and language, I specifically trace the thematic and cinematic links between the films as they draw upon concepts of hybridity and migration.

FATIH AKIN'S LOVE, DEATH, AND THE DEVIL TRILOGY: A TRIAD OF  
CROSS-CULTURAL TALES

by

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## Dedication

To Reagan Murphy and Brittany Meyer



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## Chapter 1: Fatih Akin and his Place in Film History

The son of Turkish immigrants who traveled to Germany as part of the *Gastarbeiter* program in the 1960s, Fatih Akin grew up in Hamburg with a dual Turkish-German identity. While his parents became German citizens in the 1990s, he was raised with an understanding of both cultures, which influenced his unique cinematic gaze. Studying visual communications at the Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg, Akin made his directorial debut two years prior to his 2000 graduation with the release of his feature film *Kurz und schmerzlos* [*Short Sharp Shock*] (1998), for which he received the award for Best New Director at the Bavarian Film Awards. Since then, his filmography has grown exponentially, now including successful feature films, documentaries, and shorts. These releases have culminated in a plethora of prestigious awards, including Best Director at both the 2007 Antalya Film Festival and the Bavarian Film Awards for *Auf der anderen Seite* [*The Edge of Heaven*]. The success of his films has surpassed the realm of domestic cinema, attracting international attention within political and academic spheres. In 2010, Akin received the prestigious *Verdienstorden der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (*Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany*), the only federal decoration of Germany, for his contribution in depicting the problems faced by Turkish-Germans, a recurring theme that is threaded throughout his cinema.

Drawing on Akin's own hybrid identity, his films focus on transcultural themes of migration, emphasizing issues pertinent within worldwide, European, and German political contexts. The magnitude of scholarship on his works reveals how his distinct background creates a "double vision" (Mennel), a two-fold gaze that

intertwines his dual Turkish-German heritage to establish a new space and platform representative of the current generation, one of multiculturalism and multilingualism. Following the release of his 2004 drama *Gegen die Wand* [*Head-On*], Akin commented on Turkish-German migrants in Germany: “Today we no longer tell our stories from the margins, but from the center of society” (Beier). From this center emerges a unique gaze through which Akin channels his Turkish-German cultural duality to offer audiences glimpses into the lives of second and third generation immigrants.

While most of Akin’s films (*Kurz und schmerzlos*, *Gegen die Wand*, and *Auf der anderen Seite*) emphasize the liminal status of immigrants, specifically Turkish-Germans, in the process of political and cultural assimilation, his filmography also branches out to other immigrant populations. For example, the 2002 comedic drama *Solino* traces the lives of first- and second-generation Italian immigrants. Much like Akin’s parents, the Amato family in *Solino* moved to Germany in the 1960s as part of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Through comedic twists and turns, the family members venture between Germany and Italy. Similarly, Akin’s 2009 comedic film *Soul Kitchen* depicts Germans of Greek decent. With a storyline based loosely on co-writer Adam Bousdoukos’ personal experiences owning a Greek restaurant, *Soul Kitchen* follows the struggling Zinos Kazantsakis as he humorously struggles to revamp his grungy Hamburg restaurant. Overall, Akin’s oeuvre focuses on the experience of migration, placing migrants at the center to show audiences the varied lifestyles and values carried over from their home to new country of residence.

This focus extends behind the scenes, to the production context of his films as well, as reflected in Akin's meticulous casting choices. Akin tends to collaborate with actors of similar hybrid backgrounds and cast them repeatedly in varying roles. For example, Adam Bousdoukos appears in *Kurz und schmerzlos*, *Im Juli*, *Solino*, *Gegen die Wand*, *Soul Kitchen*, and *The Cut*, while Akin's brother Cem Akin also acts in six of his films. Akin's choice of actors and actresses in his films draws heavily upon their individual identities. In an interview with Feridun Zaimoglu, Akin recalls his personal inspiration for *Gegen die Wand* in an experience from his youth, when a Turkish girlfriend asked him if he would marry her. He explains that while he said no, he never shook the idea as a good premise for a film. Initially his plot idea was comedic, yet the concept changed when he was working on *Kurz und Schmerzlos* in 1998 (Akin 233). Upon meeting Birol Ünel, Akin was inspired by the actor's mien and physicality to transform the film from a comedy to a tragedy. Akin's predilection in casting actors of migrant backgrounds harnesses his "double vision," which he explains as follows:

Unser Blick auf die deutsche Gesellschaft ist ein anderer. Und dadurch auch der auf das Kino. Wir haben noch einen zweiten Blick, den unserer Herkunftsländer. Dann sehen wir das Land durch ganz andere Augen. Wir sehen Sachen, die andere Leute nicht mehr wahrnehmen. Das macht unsere Filme anders. Nicht, dass sie dadurch besser würden, das ist keine Frage der Qualität. Aber wir bringen einfach eine andere Perspektive ein. (Ranze)

This duality of cultures lends itself to reinterpreting cultural norms through the eyes of those who straddle multiple backgrounds. As Akin states, this does not make

directors with migrant backgrounds better than natural-born citizens, but it offers a new perspective to onlookers less familiar with or tolerant of the ever-increasing multiculturalism taking root in Europe.

Alexandra Ludewig's *Screening Nostalgia: 100 Years of German Heimat Film* traces the history and conventional patterns of the Heimat genre, grouping Akin with post-unification, present-day German directors, who "have provided new impulses...and have thus provoked a certain renaissance and renewal of the genre" (Ludewig 13). Ludewig writes that Akin and a plethora of other younger generation German directors, "have discovered Heimat anew, extending the perception of the concept beyond the national sphere and finding Heimatesque qualities in a variety of regional, national, and supra-national spaces ranging from urban areas to seascape" (13). Akin revolutionizes contemporary, post-wall German cinema, particularly because his films incorporate experiences pertinent to subsequent generations of immigrants whose identity is hybrid. Therefore, these films resonate with intended audiences of similar backgrounds while using these themes to reach a wider public.

Akin captures these experiences by drawing on cultural stereotypes in both comedic and dramatic plots to convey how universal themes like love, death, and violence are not specific to the German national context. These themes present themselves in his most celebrated directorial accomplishment in Germany, a cinematic trilogy inflecting traditional Turkish values with transnational themes. Within the span of a decade, Akin released *Gegen die Wand* in 2004, *Auf der anderen Seite* in 2007, and most recently *The Cut* in 2014, completing the trilogy he calls *Love, Death, and the Devil*. *Head-On* opens in a Hamburg psychiatric clinic

following the respective suicide attempts of protagonists Sibel Güner and Cahit Tomruk. Upon discovering that both are Turkish-German, Sibel devises a no-strings-attached deal between widower Cahit, allowing her to live independently from her conservative family. What follows is a tumultuous relationship between the two, resulting in marriage, murder, and eastward migration. Not far from Hamburg, *The Edge of Heaven* opens in Bremen and traces generational migration among Turkish immigrants, Turkish-Germans, and Germans. Divided into thirds, the drama follows three families of parents and children intermingled between Germany and Turkey. The characters crisscross between cultures and languages. Lastly, *The Cut* continues the recurring theme of migration contextualized historically through the displacement caused by the diabolical events of the Armenian genocide. Opening in 1915, the film follows protagonist Nazaret Manoogian as he embarks on a westward transcontinental journey to find his daughters. Maimed and muted by a near fatal cut to his throat, Nazaret escapes the clutches of the Ottoman soldiers who massacred his comrades to begin an epic roam which traces his family to the United States. From a dysfunctional relationship based on convenience to a father's determination to survive for the sake of his children, Akin's *Love, Death, and the Devil*<sup>1</sup> presents three films very different in style and substance. The trilogy, however, is linked by the ceaselessness of movement as well as by Akin's use of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* to prevent the audience from losing themselves completely in the narrative. These distancing effects represent the specific themes upon which each film of the trilogy is focused (love,

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<sup>1</sup> Though Akin does not cite it as a source of inspiration, the *Love, Death, and the Devil* resonates with the 1513 engraving *Ritter, Tod und Teufel* by German artist Albrecht Dürer. This sixteenth century print influenced German artists like Richard Wagner, Thomas Mann, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Its depictions of a knight, death and the devil resonates with Akin's trilogy for interpreting similar themes.

death, and the devil), while simultaneously linking them. Finally, Akin's directorial gaze relies on his Turkish-German "double-vision" which he emphasizes in character development and collaborations with actors of similar hybridic<sup>2</sup> backgrounds to his own.

Throughout the trilogy, Akin reinterprets *Heimat* through the cinematic aesthetics of location and sound. In lieu of consistent physical space to represent specific cultures, he transverses scenic locals to carry hybrid identity across borders. With each film, the type of travel increases in scale, from one move to a specific location, to a back and forth exchange, on to a global journey. In *Gegen die Wand*, Cahit and Sibel both uproot their lives to return to Turkey. By contrast, in *Auf der anderen Seite* the depth and focus of characters expands. There is an exchange, as characters travel between Turkey and Germany. The mobility of the first two films is an eastward movement, with Turkey as the desired destination. The use of language also expands, as the characters communicate in English, German, and Turkish. Though *The Cut* takes a more historically accurate approach, the third part of Akin's trilogy emphasizes global relations, specifically in Nazaret's travels from one side of the world to another. In an increasingly global society, migration has led to the hybridity of cultures, but, as Akin emphasizes, this hybridity is often accompanied by violence. Violence is the hallmark of all three films, as it plays a central role in plot, unifying the varied stories and emphasizing metaphors of the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy.

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<sup>2</sup> Stemming from the word "hybridism" or the quality or condition of being hybrid, I use the word "hybridic" as a descriptor of those whose identity melds two or more cultures, ethnicities, and/or national backgrounds.



## Chapter 2: *Gegen die Wand*

Dimitris Eleftheriotis explains that “violence permeates the encounters between many of the characters in Akin’s films...Routes and destinies converge but do so in conflict and with difficulty, foregrounding and negotiating deeply rooted differences, belonging to different types of travelling and involving different emotive registers” (Eleftheriotis 133). This theme of violence resonates across the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy. The convergence of routes in *Gegen die Wand* presents itself in the roller-coaster-like love affair between Cahit Tomruk (Birol Ünel) and Sibel Güner (Sibel Kekilli). Akin’s portrayal of Sibel and Cahit’s disjointed love story is a visual experience, as he draws upon his own life to create the narrative space of the film. In *Fatih Akin: Diary of a Film Traveller*, Akin explains, “When looking at my films, I see a difference between the German and the Turkish locations. The German ones seem arbitrary while the Turkish ones seem special. As I live in Germany, I may lack a visual detachment from the sites. For me Turkey is still virgin soil to be discovered and understood” (134). These differences between cultures are rooted in the locations of Hamburg and Istanbul.

Upon noticing Cahit’s Turkish background, Sibel forms an attachment to plan a wedding and escape the conservative household in which she was raised. *Gegen die Wand* begins in Hamburg, where, after overhearing Cahit’s Turkish last name in the hospital, Sibel sets out to marry him. Though she is half his age and Cahit is rough around the edges, Sibel’s desire is irrepressible and she attempts to bribe Cahit into marriage with contraband. Landing in the hospital after both attempting suicide, Cahit

and Sibel turn to drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. Aware that Cahit is not allowed by the clinic staff to have a drink, Sibel engages him with the promise of beer. It is this first moment of togetherness that I will analyze in more detail below as it illustrates the hybridist transnationalism both protagonists embody.

To appease her conservative family, Sibel marries Cahit to circumvent living by her father's strict rules. By finally agreeing to marry her, mostly out of fear that she will do more harm to herself, Cahit jumps through the hoops of a traditional Turkish marriage to Sibel. The story takes a turn from the overarching theme of tragedy to a lighter comedic sentiment when Cahit convinces his friend, Seref, to pose as his uncle when asking Sibel's father and brother for her hand in marriage. Their overprotectiveness alludes to the stereotypical Turkish familial sphere, in which the male figures dominate the household and decision-making for all members. The wedding which follows emphasizes the traditions of Turkish culture.

Sibel's reckless lifestyle after moving in with Cahit causes disownment from her immediate family and becomes a catalyst for her movement eastward which leads to more violence. After they spend more time together, Cahit and Sibel's marriage of convenience develops into a romantic attraction, and the two fall in love. This love results in scandal when Cahit is sent to prison for killing another man in a fit of pure jealous rage. As a result, Sibel's family disowns her for the scandalous events that transpired. Moving in with her independent cousin, Selma, in Istanbul, Sibel continues to live recklessly. Out alone at night, Sibel is overtaken by dominant men who rape, beat, and leave her for dead in an alley. Not long after, upon his release from prison and with the monetary aid of his loyal friend and "uncle," Seref, Cahit

returns to Turkey to find his wife. After arriving in Istanbul, Cahit learns from Selma that Sibel has since moved in with another man and is raising a child. Yet still overcome with affection, Cahit and Sibel share a romantic tryst, after which Cahit asks Sibel to abandon her domestic life and escape to Mersin with him. The film concludes with Cahit boarding the bus, presumably to his hometown of Mersin, while Sibel's loyalty to her daughter and partner prompt her to stay.

A key exemplar of post-unification German cinema, *Gegen die Wand* can be characterized more specifically as a “hyphenated” Turkish-German *Heimat* film. Though the *Heimat* film has been regularly reinvented throughout the history of German cinema, Alexandra Ludewig explains that even in the post-unification period the *Heimat* film genre “addresses the principal human desire for happiness and identification with one's natural and social surroundings by offering answers that may aid in attaining or defining these goals” (Ludewig 63). This human desire is most evident in Akin's film in the context of Sibel and Cahit's relationship, one created to escape stereotypically constricting Turkish gender and sexual roles for a freer, easygoing German attitude. In *Gegen die Wand*, the desire for happiness manifests itself especially in Sibel's character. Struggling to appease her traditional Turkish family, she finds solace in Cahit, who has rejected his Turkish identity to live a European lifestyle in the punk subculture of Hamburg.

As Ludewig explains, *Heimat* films may straddle other genre characteristics and “as a result, the *Heimat* film genre can be described more along the lines of shared aesthetic codes and storyline motifs, with which very different agendas were pursued at different times. Socio-historical conflicts are aesthetically transformed and

translated into universally understandable images, myths, and constellations” (Ludewig 63). Akin and his choice in actors with Turkish-German backgrounds reflect their personal experiences of migration and transformation in new cultures. These experiences are universal in giving viewers the opportunity to better understand their circumstances and affiliated emotions. In *Gegen die Wand*, Akin addresses socio-historical conflicts in recurring storyline motifs and through the aesthetics of language derived from his own gaze as a Turkish-German director, particularly via the characterization of the film’s main characters, Sibel and Cahit, and the crucial function of casting choices in the development of their roles. Grounded in personal experience, the actors’ performances incorporate their own individual identities into Akin’s film. These performances draw on actual experiences the actors faced, but they are also mythicized by Akin’s characterization.

Ultimately, Sibel and Cahit’s tales portray developments specifically applicable to Turkish-German migrants. In focusing particularly on socio-historical conflicts faced by second generation immigrants, *Gegen die Wand* melds the Heimat film with Turkish-German cinematic traits, creating a hybrid form. In an interview with Wendy Mitchell, Akin explains that, “When I wrote the film, I kept in my mind that I have three audiences — obviously, there are more, but these are three big ones — German, Turkish, German-Turkish (people like me). They are all different from each other” (Mitchell). Though his intended audience extends beyond German, Turkish, and German-Turkish viewers, the plot of *Gegen die Wand* is constructed from a Turkish-German standpoint. Ludewig argues that Akin would reject the hyphenated label of “Turkish-German,” for “many of the accented directors feel a

strong bond with their birthplace or residence in Germany and sympathize strongly with their protagonists, who demand recognition and representation in the land of their birth and where they reside” (Ludewig 399). However, Akin clearly thematizes this hyphenation in his films. He crosses between Turkish and German cultures, seamlessly blending them into something new. For viewers who have no personal connection to cross-cultural upbringing, Akin uses the space of film to give them more than a glimpse into this hybridity. Instead, it places the immigrant and dual-cultural identity as the center of the plot, showing how central these issues are. This is most evident in *Gegen die Wand* and reappears in *Auf der anderen Seite*, as both films use locations familiar to Akin. By placing his own autobiographical references into the plot, he constructs a space of relatability specific to Turkish-German audiences. It also introduces experiences more common to second or third generation immigrants who have never been to their cultural home, like Turkish Germans who have never been to Turkey. This space also targets Germans without a Turkish background who may not relate directly to the protagonist’s plight, but can derive a better understanding of the issues immigrants must face.

From the opening of *Gegen die Wand*, the mise-en-scène and cinematography straddle German and Turkish culture with music. The recurring performances of the Turkish singer Idil Üner alongside Selim Sesler and his orchestra on the Bosphorus, which punctuate the film, foreshadow the doomed love affair. As the first portion of the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy, the overarching theme of *Gegen die Wand* is one of love. While it is initially a fabricated love on Sibel’s part to liberate herself

from her conservative and overbearing father and brother, the relationship she forms with Cahit progresses emotionally into a tragic love story.



Figure 1

The symmetry of the orchestra focuses on the singer, as she pops with her red dress in the foreground, alluding to the importance of her song. The wide shot also emphasizes the backdrop of Istanbul, a destination which does not present itself until the latter half of the film. With each cut back to this stage, time passes and the day turns into night. James P. Martin analyzes this setting in conjunction with the lyrics: “The romantic fatalism of the song and the symbolic sunset are in stark contrast to the brutal realism of the main narrative, yet they share the tragic parting of the lovers” (Martin, 88). Akin explains that the recurring musical interludes alert audiences to the fact that the film is “built on five structural acts. I wanted to work with that, and to really show the audience when a new act is beginning, one of the basic ideas for the mood of the film was the idea that western punk music is really connected — in the lyrics for example — into classical Turkish music” (Mitchell). These musical interludes also function like a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, distancing the audience

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<sup>3</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.

from the narrative and inspiring critical contemplation of the film's overarching themes.

The reappearing band functions as an homage to traditional Turkish culture, while the lyrics foretell the downfall of Sibel and Cahit's relationship. As Ali Nihat Eken argues, the interludes serve as a connection between East and West. While the characters are fluid, moving between Turkish and German cultures, the band is "a recurring statement of old Turkish customs and ethos...Each appearance of the band in Akin's film, in other words each musical interlude, hence, encourages the audience to reflect critically on Akin's film" (Eken 34). Sibel and Cahit's love is foreshadowed through the song "Saniye," which is sung at regular intervals over the course of the movie. The lyrics of "Saniye," sung by the woman in the red dress, tell of unrequited love from a man's perspective:

Along the stream I wander  
Watching for the fish  
In the troubled water  
But I am troubled over you  
My beloved Saniye  
With your wind blown hair  
I am saddened by your gaze  
That does not requite my love  
But I am troubled over you  
My beloved Saniye  
With your wind blown hair  
I am saddened by your gaze  
That does not requite my love. (Akin)

The story of "Saniye" correlates with the love story of Sibel and Cahit. "Saniye," meaning "second" in Turkish, alludes to several qualities of Sibel and Cahit's relationship. Since Cahit is a widower, Sibel takes on the role of his second wife following their marriage vows. Since the two met at a hospital having tried to commit

suicide, their relationship, no matter how jumbled, was created out of second chances. Having survived their personal suicide attempts, Cahit and Sibel's second chance begins when they choose to be together. Sibel is to Cahit as Saniye is to the love-struck speaker. Much like a fish in troubled water, Sibel swims through a sea of problems before, during, and after meeting Cahit. Yet, like the man in the song, Cahit's love is unrequited. Martin expands on this, arguing that "both characters resign themselves to performing unfulfilling, traditional roles in the end. Their mutual performance of hybrid identities in Germany was sustainable, yet they are also unable to fall back on romantic stereotypes as depicted in Turkish song" (Martin 89). Though he cares for her and wishes to ease her troubles, Sibel finds a new life for herself in Turkey, moving on and away from her past relationship with Cahit. Therefore, the meaning of second also references their independent decisions to settle in Turkey at the end of the film as the beginning of a second life without one another.

In foreshadowing Sibel and Cahit's relationship, the song "Saniye" play upon Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space." As Eken suggests in his reading of the film, "Saniye" connects the hybrid identities of Sibel and Cahit, as they "cannot be described by referring to only one side of the connecting line because Akin's major characters move on a fluid surface; they move within and between German and Turkish contexts" (Eken 35). Eken's analysis draws on Homi Bhabha's concept of "third space" in elaborating the German-Turkish hybridity of *Gegen die Wand*: "Cahit and Sibel partake in two cultures and therefore obviously occupy a double cultural space and out of this double cultural space arises a new hybrid culture which 'gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable', a new era of



negotiation of meaning and representation” (35). Akin’s ability to transfer this “third space” effortlessly on screen stems not least from his deliberate choice of actors. In choosing actors with hybrid backgrounds, Akin created a chemistry between Sibel and Cahit off stage before the shooting began.

In finding inspiration from his own life and the lives of the actors, Akin includes their personal conflicts within the aesthetics of the film. For example, though *Gegen die Wand* draws on Akin’s personal life, he was raised quite conservatively. In an interview with Helmut Ziegler, Akin explains the differences between himself and Ünel, “der link war natürlich, daß Birol Deutschtürke ist wie ich. Aber er durfte alles, was ich nicht durfte. Auf Normen und Traditionen scheißen. Selbst meine Eltern, die recht streng sind und konservativ, haben den mal betrunken erlebt und fanden ihn dabei noch sympathisch” (Akin 240). Ünel’s personal lifestyle contributed to the story’s emphasis on conflicting modern and traditional Turkish ideals.

In order to create a fiery love affair on screen, Akin needed to find a female capable of matching Ünel’s immense stage presence, which he did through discovering Sibel Kekilli. Once the male lead was cast, the necessity to find a personality that could match Ünel’s proved to be another struggle. Akin explains, “Das war eine ganz große Aufgabe...Eine Frau zu finden, die die Eier hat, dem Exzentriker Birol zu widerstehen, die genauso viel Power hat wie er und die von der schauspielerischen Qualität nicht abfällt. Eigentlich suchten wir die Nadel im Heuhaufen” (Akin 234). Much like his analogy, Akin’s discovery of Sibel Kekilli was like finding a needle in a haystack after simply stumbling upon her in public. Though his incessant search for a perfect match was lengthy, in the end, Akin’s discoveries of

both Ünel and Kekilli generated the chemistry he had in mind while writing the screenplay. The search for a perfect combination of actors resulted in Akin's decision to incorporate their individual identities and personalities within the plot.

As this brief overview suggests, the actors in Akin's films play a key role in his representation of Turkish-German identity, because they best understand the emotions and experiences affiliated with such an upbringing, having experienced similar situations. In *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, Jan Assmann differentiates two forms of identity: the individual (*individuelle Identität*) and the personal (*personale Identität*). Assmann explains:

*Individuelle Identität* ist das im Bewusstsein des Einzelnen aufgebaute und durchgehaltene Bild der ihn von allen („signifikanten“) Anderen unterscheidenden Einzelzüge, das am Leitfaden des Leibes entwickelte Bewusstsein seines irreduziblen Eigenseins, seiner Unverwechselbarkeit und Unersetzbarkeit... *Individuelle Identität* bezieht sich auf die Kontingenz eines Lebens mit seinen Eckdaten von Geburt und Tod, auf die Leibhaftigkeit des Daseins und seiner Grundbedürfnisse. (Assmann 131-132)

Assmann emphasizes that it is the uniqueness of the individual that distinguishes it from other bodies. In the realm of cinematography, this consciousness of the individual plays an immense role in the casting of a film. The actor most suitable for a role will stand out, as it is his display of individual identity that will fit the imagined character created for him. Such is the case with Birol Ünel and Sibel Kekilli. Akin was drawn to both actors for their loud personalities. Inspired by their individual identities, *Gegen die Wand* mythicizes specific traits, like familial roles and

engendered spheres pertinent to their Turkish-German backgrounds to incorporate layers of depth within the plot.

Akin draws specifically on Birol Ünel's rebellious individual identity to add depth to Cahit, lending him the archetypes of a "bad boy," an anti-hero of Turkish-German descent. Akin compares Ünel to "Typen wie Kurt Cobain, James Dean oder Brando. Typen, die sich selbst zerstören, Typen, die so genial sind, so talentiert, daß ihnen alles andere scheißegal ist. Und vor allem, der Typ ist Türke, der hat also denselben Background wie ich, er schießt aber auf die Tradition. Das war eine ganz große Inspiration für den Film" (Akin 233). In another interview, Akin goes so far as to compare Ünel to Mickey Rourke. As Muriel Cormican explains, Akin constructs "an updated melodramatic story of a good but extremely troubled man saved by the love of a good, if also very troubled woman" (Cormican 25). Yet this constructed identity is more than just a cookie-cutter melodrama. As Cormican explains, "Cahit inhabits a kind of urban underworld in which people live unhealthy lives, are frequently exposed to violence, and take comfort in alcohol and aggressive or violent heterosexual sex...Cahit has no stable financial footing in this urban center, no career, and nothing to anchor him other than an exaggerated but threatened masculinity" (25). Cahit is only able to inhabit this unhealthy lifestyle by rejecting his Turkish identity. This bad boy identity is only masked during certain occasions in which Cahit must perform like the person Sibel asks him to, like when he cleans himself up to meet her family, wears a suit for the wedding, and reunites with Sibel upon his release from prison. These physical changes are only temporary, adding an aura of

performativity to the character's personal identity. After inhabiting these roles, Cahit is quick to shed them for his classic rebellious look that permeates the film.

Until his prison sentence, Cahit embraces a German lifestyle in which he can live recklessly. After agreeing to marry Sibel and meeting with her family, he visits their apartment with Seref. Sibel's parents are genuinely interested in Cahit's background. Yet his responses are disappointing to them, for he has severed ties with his Turkish identity. Not only does he fabricate lies about his work to make his status seem more appealing, but he employs Seref to pose as his uncle. The conversation continues when Sibel's mother asks him where his parents live:

Cahit (türkisch): Meine Eltern sind vor langer Zeit gestorben.

Birsen (türkisch): Mein herzliches Beileid. Haben Sie keine Geschwister?

Cahit (türkisch): Ja, ich habe eine Schwester. Sie lebt in Frankfurt.

Yilmaz: Dein Türkisch ist aber ganz schön im Arsch, Mann. Was hast du denn mit deinem Türkisch gemacht?

Cahit: Ich hab's in den Müll geschmissen (Akin 52).

His lack of connection to Turkey fuels Cahit's decision to take on a German identity. Cahit's rejection of Turkish identity is most evident through the language of the scene. Though he can speak and understand the language, he does so poorly, as pointed out by Sibel's brother Yilmaz. Cahit is not defensive about this. Instead, he makes it obvious that he wants nothing to do with this part of his life. By claiming to have thrown his Turkish in the garbage, Cahit's metaphor captures his anti-Turkish sentiment.

Cahit's reckless lifestyle reflects in the spaces of his job and home. Due to his lack of family ties and in the wake of his first wife's death, Cahit lives in solitude. Cormican explains that "it is the death of his wife, and thus the loss of a traditional, monogamous, heterosexual relationship, that motivates Cahit's suicidal rage" (25). Though little is revealed about his wife, her death adds to his downward spiral. Lacking structure, Cahit's life is fueled by alcohol, drugs and pure recklessness. This lifestyle presents itself in the spaces where Cahit lives and works. For example, while Cahit's place of employment, Die Fabrik, is a cultural center in Hamburg, his job is to clean up after visitors and collect empty beer bottles.



Figure 2

Built in 1971, Die Fabrik "wurde das erste und wahrscheinlich bekannteste Kultur- und Kommunikationszentrum Deutschlands... Der Maler Horst Dietrich (der die Fabrik noch heute leitet) und der Architekt Friedhelm Zeuner hatten sich für dieses Projekt eine ungefähr einhundertfünfzig Jahre alte ehemalige Maschinenfabrik in Ottensen ausgesucht." ("Fabrik") Known for hosting lectures, debates, concerts, and

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<sup>4</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.

theatre productions, Die Fabrik is portrayed in *Gegen die Wand* in a different light. To Cahit, it is a place that feeds his addiction, as he can partake in drinking when finishing his job. Akin uses dim lighting to deflect the cultural vibrancy affiliated with the concert venue and instead paints Die Fabrik as a grungy, dive-bar for recluses. Cahit's name is Turkish for "hard-working," which becomes ironic considering he is called a "bum" by others multiple times in the film. This irony draws on his migrant background, for Cahit's family arrived in Germany as Gastarbeiter to work in factories, like Die Fabrik, which once was a machine factory. Unlike his parents who sought to make better lives for themselves, Cahit's lack of work ethic portrays him as the exact opposite of his nomenclature; instead, he consistently does the bare minimum to make enough to support his lifestyle of debauchery. The Hamburg sights, especially the living spaces and reoccurring bars, are depicted with dark, harsh lighting that conveys negative emotions. The locations in Germany in which *Gegen die Wand* is shot are constricting and more hostile compared to Istanbul. For example, the outside of Cahit's apartment is covered in graffiti. The stairway leading to his door is cold and bare cement. It is gray and dull.



Figure 3

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<sup>5</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.



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Figure 4

Until Sibel moves in and redecorates, his apartment is also an amalgamation of his being. However, Sibel's redecoration makes only a temporary change to the interior. The grungy, punk exterior remains long after her feminine revamping of the space. These spaces foreshadow the ultimate downfall of their relationship, for Cahit's character is too accustomed to a life of solitude, that even Sibel's minor changes fail to transform him into an ideal husband. This parallels with Cahit's performances as a "good" Turk among Sibel's family, for these moments of domesticity and compliance of merely temporary illusions to appease others.

Much like Akin's deliberate choice of casting Birol Ünel as Cahit, Sibel Kekilli's portrayal of Sibel Güner can be traced to her personal experiences as a second generation Turkish-German immigrant. Sibel Kekilli is the German-born daughter of Turkish parents. Kekilli's individual identity stems from a hybridic background, making her an ideal choice to represent Sibel. Her uniqueness fit the mold Akin wanted for the film. After multiple casting calls, Akin was drawn to Sibel

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<sup>6</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.

Kikelli after spotting her in public. As he recollects, “Sie hatte die Eier...Sie hatte den Ehrgeiz...Sie hat ganz früh mal etwas gesagt: ‘Wenn ich was mache, dann mach ich das richtig.’ Ich dachte, das ist Schnack, das ist Pose. Heute weiß ich daß es kein Schnack war. Sie hat das richtig gemacht, ganz straight. Ich habe immer gesagt, sie ist ein Geschenk Gottes, und so sehe ich sie halt auch“ (Akin, 234). Just as Akin knew Ünel was the perfect actor to represent Cahit, he was immediately attracted to Kekilli for her individual identity. This is relevant because Akin needed to ensure a balanced chemistry in which both actors could

Akin mythicizes Sibel by drawing from the root of her name and immersing it into the film. The name Sibel stems from Cybele, the Anatolian mother goddess, a myth that Akin draws on by keeping the actress’s name for his character in *Gegen die Wand*. In comparing Kekilli to a gift from god, Akin’s description plays into the anthroponomy of her given name.

Few texts exist on Cybele. However, Lynn Roller notes that depictions of her in Phrygian art reveal her as Phrygia’s only known goddess. Roller suggests that Cybele “transcends boundaries...between the known environment of life and the unknown world of death” (Roller, 113). In *Gegen die Wand*, this transcending of boundaries presents itself in Sibel’s multiple suicide attempts. Just as she must straddle the cultural differences of Turkey and Germany, Sibel occupies a “third space.” Her Turkish-German hybridity lends itself as a crutch she may lean on to cross between cultures and alter her being for those she finds herself amongst. For example, when Sibel is with her family, she must restrain her urges and in order to comply with the conservative, traditional values her father believes in. When she



moves in with Cahit, however, Sibel transforms into a reckless vixen. Roller writes that Cybele was not “limited by the conventional modern definitions of motherly qualities, of fertility and nurturing, but was focused on a figure of power and protection, able to touch on many aspects of life and mediate between the boundaries of the known and unknown” (Roller, 114). In *Gegen die Wand*, Sibel eventually finds herself adhering to “conventional motherly qualities” (Roller), but still seeks temptation when Cahit locates her in Istanbul.

Akin’s choice in casting Sibel Kekilli as Sibel in *Gegen die Wand* finds inspiration in the actress’ individual identity that takes form on the screen. Kekilli’s experiences in pornography before being cast as Sibel add to this identity. Following the release of *Gegen die Wand*, Kekilli’s involvement in a series of pornographic films caused a stir in the media. In an interview, Kekilli explained matter-of-factly why she chose to act in pornographic films: “Aus Geldmangel. Ich hatte immer mehrere Jobs...es war wirklich so, wie es immer heißt: ich war jung und brauchte Geld. Und daß ich diese Filme gemacht habe, das war vielleicht eine Art Rebellion...Ich wollte mir damit vielleicht selber beweisen, daß ich mein eigenes Leben leben kann, wie ich will.“ (Akin, 245-246). Kekilli’s reasoning for turning to pornography is one of liberation and necessity; she explains that the movies were a form of rebellion. Similarly, Akin’s depiction of Sibel in *Gegen die Wand* is fueled by sex. Cormican explains that “although complex in a variety of ways and certainly strong, independent, and rebellious, Sibel is ultimately a sexual creature whose primary struggle after escaping the parental home is to learn to contain her naturalized sex drive” (Cormican, 28). Sibel not only struggles with containing her

sexuality in Germany, but after moving eastward she is exposed to the dangers of living liberally. This awakens a change within Sibel to alter her tendencies and settle into a domestic life.

Kekilli's acting roles parallel with her personal life, as she uses her platform as an actress to vocalize issues faced by women universally. Following the film's release and the revelations about Kikelli's past, reactions from Turkey varied. However, Suzan Gülfirat has argued that Kekilli's sexual performance of Sibel created a new discourse in Turkey: "Viele Türken sind tief religiöse Menschen, die ihre Köpfe zur Seite drehen, wenn im deutschen Fernsehen eine Kußszene kommt. Vor dem Hintergrund hat Sibel Kekilli eine kleine sexuelle Revolution verursacht" (Akin, 220). This sexual revolution defied conservative stereotypes, paving the way for acceptance and a new public discourse on sex. The small sexual revolution Gülfirat alludes to is important, not least because Sibel's story also includes discourses on sexual violence. As a member of *Terre des Femmes*, an organization advocating human rights for women, Kekilli released a statement raising awareness about the issue:

Viele strenggläubige Familien unterdrücken die menschlichen und gesellschaftlichen Ideale wie Individualität, Selbstbestimmung, Selbstverwirklichung, Gleichberechtigung und Unabhängigkeit, wenn es um ihre Töchter und Frauen geht. Dadurch entsteht das Doppelleben bzw. die Parallelgesellschaft. Das hat verheerende Folgen für die jungen Mädchen und Frauen. Und weil diese Frauen genauso ein Teil unserer Gesellschaft sind und sein sollten, schaue ich nicht weg. (*Terre des Femmes*)

Kekilli's outspoken activism against violence against women alongside *Terre des Femmes* shows her personal awareness of female oppression. Having worked in the pornography industry and acted in sexually charged roles, Kekilli's voice is one of understanding. Not only has she lived through sexual violence and acted out its horrors in films, but her Turkish-German background offers a new perspective on gender and sexual oppression.

In *Gegen die Wand*, while the plot is triggered by Sibel's yearning for sexual freedom, to achieve it, she resorts to mutilation when seduction fails, foreshadowing the violence to come. After sneaking out of the hospital, Sibel and Cahit are drinking at a bar. Their conversation turns to the reason they both ended up at the same place. Each having attempted suicide, Cahit asks Sibel why she wanted to kill herself. She responds, asking "Findest du meine Nase schön? Faß sie mal an." Following her directions, Cahit gently runs his finger down Sibel's nose, playfully tapping her lip. The close-up, over the shoulder shots highlight the stark contrasts between the two, who resemble beauty and the beast. While Cahit looks significantly older, worn-out and broken with a neck brace, Sibel's face radiates youth. Her blemish-free, porcelain-like face glows under the bar lights. It appears a physical connection is beginning to blossom. Yet as the conversation continues, Sibel gently explains that her beautiful nose was broken by her brother, "weil er mich beim Händchenhalten erwischt hat." Immediately, Cahit pulls back. In this instance, he becomes aware of her conservative upbringing. A look of fear even flashes before his eyes. This could be attributed to his growing uneasiness towards Sibel's brother, who inhabits the heteronormative role of protector. Sibel continues to flaunt her breasts, telling Cahit

to touch them as well. She explains, “Ich will leben, Cahit. Ich will leben, ich will tanzen, ich will ficken! Und nicht nur mit einem Typen. Verstehst du?” This sexual liberation can only be found in rejecting her restrictive family for a less conservative relationship. In latching on to Cahit, Sibel finds the opportunity to do so. Even in this scene the two are positioned across from one another, with a beer bottle in the center.



7

Figure 5



8

Figure 6

Remaining in focus, the beer symbolizes the temptation that fuels their love. When Cahit riles Sibel up by passively ignoring her, she reaches for the bottle, strikes it on the table, and cuts herself with the jagged glass.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Figure 7

The lighting helps visualize the violence by illuminating Cahit and Sibel in the center of the screen. Including the beer bottle within focus on screen also alludes to how their relationship is driven by addictive behaviors. The shot also flips the view of Cahit and Sibel to offer a clearer view of her cutting her left arm, as she grabbed the bottle with her right hand. By choosing to inflict self-harm with the beer bottle, Sibel's reliance on alcohol as a means of coping with her own suicidal rage presents itself, foreshadowing future self-harm as the plot progresses in both Germany and Turkey.

*Gegen die Wand* depicts various forms of violence to which Sibel is subjected in both the private and public to show its universal nature. As Cormican writes, "Akin might be seen to criticize a predatory masculinity that continues to exist...because of conflicting cultural messages that make women both things to be revered in private (home: mother, sister, daughter) and to be reified in public (city: object of sexual desire, property, Other)" (Cormican, 27). This criticism of predatory masculinity presents itself most obviously after Sibel returns to Istanbul. After moving in with her cousin, Sibel is raped, beaten, and left for dead after provoking a group of men in an

<sup>9</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.

alleyway. Yet in Sibel's case, she is also violated in the private sphere through her brother's punishments. These acts of violence suggest that it is perpetuated within the family and may be passed from generation to generation.

*Gegen die Wand*'s exploration of love uses location, specifically between Germany and Turkey to trace the relationship between Cahit and Sibel. Cahit and Sibel's outsider status draws the two of them together. While Cahit and Sibel both come from Turkish backgrounds, they associate freedom with German identity. Rejected his Turkish identity, as evident in his poor Turkish skills and disdain towards speaking the language, Cahit lives his life without the rules and restrictions Sibel faces. Sibel uses Cahit's Turkish roots to escape her overbearing family. Their violent love affair is most relatable to viewers of Turkish-German decent, for they are most understanding of the restrictive traditions. Significantly, these viewers have the most direct linguistic interpretation of the conversations. Since the film constantly transitions between German and Turkish, an international audience is forced to rely on the subtitles, potentially missing out on cultural queues.

However, as part of the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy, *Gegen die Wand* ultimately becomes a transnational film. Randal Halle argues that, "The milieu that Cahit and Sibel inhabit is a multicultural, permeable milieu. Their conflicts derive not from their ethnicity but rather are the general problems that attend to any melodramatic characters, family conflicts, love pains, bad decisions" (Halle, 167). He continues to explain that "we cannot and should not overlook the ethnicity of the characters. Still, a transnational normality infuses the possibilities of the characters" (167). Therefore, while the plot and Akin's choice of actors are specific to Turkish-

German culture, the overarching theme of love extends beyond simply German or Turkish-German cinema, as the messages are transnational in nature.

Lastly, *Gegen die Wand* also includes traits of a Heimat film as well, as the lives of second- and third-generation immigrants like Sibel and Cahit are representative of a new German Heimat. While their trials and tribulations are relatable to an international audience, the specificities of their felt self-destructive relationship may best be understood by viewers with similar hybridic backgrounds. Akin's "double vision" as a Turkish-German director revolutionized German cinema, particularly because his films incorporate experiences pertinent to subsequent generations of immigrants whose identity is an amalgamation of nationality and culture. In *New Directions in German Cinema*, Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood articulate the immense growth German cinema has achieved since 2000, moving from the cinema of consensus towards transnational contexts, further illuminating Fatih Akin's influence. Within post-unification German cinema:

German film must be seen increasingly transnational rather than national context, both in regard to the manner in which the films are produced and the stories they choose to tell. The 'transnational turn' in German filmmaking is, moreover, a challenge to all the country's filmmakers, whatever their social or ethnic background, provoking them to reflect upon Germany's place in the world as well as contemporary constructions of Germanness. (Cooke, Homewood 4)

It is this transnational turn in Akin's work that redefines the traditional boundaries of a German Heimat film. Akin continues to challenge the boundaries of stereotypical

Germanness by using the “double vision” of a hyphenated Turkish-German director to provide audiences with films that embrace the experiences of citizens with migrant backgrounds. Merging cultures creates themes of transnationalism which he continues and furthers in a more advanced directorial style in the second film of the trilogy, *Auf der anderen Seite*.



### Chapter 3: *Auf der anderen Seite*

Of the three films in Fatih Akin's *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy, *Auf der anderen Seite* is the most complicated in terms of storyline and character development. The story defies a linear plot, instead relying on parallels, doubling, and "crisscrossing" of characters to further illuminate themes of transnationalism. Overall, the main characters are linked through their interaction with Nejat, yet their true identities are only revealed to the viewer. The father-son relationship between Ali and Nejat illuminates the generational differences of first- and second-generation Turkish immigrants. Through casting, location, and symbolism, Akin incorporates factual backgrounds and experiences within the plot to present a new mode of German cinema through his "double vision" as a German-Turkish director. *Auf der anderen Seite* transcends borders and cultures, interweaving the six main characters via storyline and familial ties through a hybrid space of both Turkish and German identity. Following its release, the film was Germany's entry as the Best Foreign Language Film for the 2007 Academy Awards. It also went on to win the *Prix du Scénario* at the Cannes Film Festival.

*Auf der anderen Seite* is divided into three acts: "Yeter's Tod", "Lotte's Tod", and "Auf der anderen Seite," all of which are organized around a death. "Yeter's Tod" opens with the budding relationship between widower Ali Aksu (Tuncel Kurtiz) and Yeter Öztürk (Nursel Köse). Both are Turkish immigrants living in Bremen. Ali discovers Yeter, who is working as a prostitute, and asks her to stop working in exchange for monthly payments to live with him. Upon moving in, Yeter meets Ali's son, Nejat Aksu (Baki Davrak), a professor of German literature. After Ali suffers a

heart attack, Yeter confides in Nejat and tells him of her twenty-seven-year-old daughter in Turkey. When Ali returns from the hospital, he drunkenly accuses Yeter and Nejat of sleeping together, striking Yeter and killing her. While Ali is sent to jail, Nejat feels a responsibility to find Yeter's daughter and help give her the education her mother wanted for her. As he is unable to find her, Nejat leaves fliers with Yeter's photo around the area. The first act ends with Nejat in Istanbul, where he stumbles on a German-language bookstore and buys it.

Act two of *Auf der anderen Seite*, "Lotte's Tod", begins in Istanbul, as Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay), Yeter's daughter and a member of a Turkish anti-government resistance group narrowly escapes arrest after participating in a violent demonstration. Fleeing to Bremen with the help of political allies, Ayten finds herself living on the street. Rather than telling her daughter that she was working as a prostitute, Yeter told Ayten she was working in a shoe shop. Therefore, while coming to terms with living on the streets illegally, Ayten searches for her mother in the local shoe shops. Not long after, Ayten meets a university student, Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkovska), who takes Ayten home with her. The two become lovers, which Lotte's mother Susanne does not approve. Her disapproval stems from the xenophobia of an older generation, which the film points out ironically given her progressive youth lifestyle hitchhiking across India. Not long after, Ayten's illegal status as a Turkish national is revealed, and she is deported immediately and in Turkey receives a prison sentence of up to twenty years. Upset, Lotte moves to Turkey to free her, but soon discovers the process is longer and more difficult than she had imagined. Not long after her move to Istanbul, Lotte and her mother cut off ties. The film develops

connections between characters across its discrete narratives towards the end when Lotte rents a room from Nejat after meeting him at the bookstore. To help Ayten, Lotte recovers the contraband gun she hid after the demonstration, only to be shot with the same gun when young neighborhood boys steal her bag.

The conclusion of “Auf der anderen Seite”, from which the film draws its name, begins with Ali’s release from German prison and deportation to Turkey. He returns to his home in Trabzon along the Black Sea. At the same time, Susanne (Hanna Schygulla), Lotte’s Mother, flies to Istanbul to understand what happened to Lotte. After meeting Nejat, she visits Ayten in prison, offering her an olive branch of apology and support to free her. With her help, Ayten is released. Returning to Nejat’s bookstore, Susanne is asked to watch over it for him while he drives to Trabzon to visit his father. After he leaves, Susanne asks Ayten to live with her at Nejat’s house, since the two have reconciled and Ayten needs a home. The film concludes with a mirroring of the opening sequence. Nejat is driving to Trabzon for the Bayram festival to search for his father. In the ambiguous final scene, Nejat waits for his father on the beach.

Of the various parent-child relationships spanning the film, the father-son pair, Ali Aksu and Nejat Aksu, stand in stark contrast, juxtaposing the views of first- and second-generation Turkish-German immigrants. While Ali embodies the stereotypical Turkish role of patriarchal masculinity, particularly in his treatment of Yeter, Nejat’s character embodies Akin’s sense of “double vision.” Nejat breaks out of an engendered traditional sphere, energetically pursuing enlightenment through literature. Overall, Akin’s filmic choices in casting and location transcend the

singular cinematic traditions of Turkey and Germany, and his doubling of scenes serves to direct the viewer towards a better understanding of symbols that reappear in the film.

As a German-Turkish-Italian co-production, *Auf der anderen Seite* transcends borders with filming locations spanning the countries of Turkey and Germany. The characters themselves crisscross culture, a phrase Barbara Mennel attributes to Akin's cinematic style. As she explains:

The repeated displacements in *The Edge of Heaven* rely on a complex organization of criss-crossing characters within the filmic space and time, which in turn is produced by a plot about people who move between different countries and regions. The parallel temporal organization of the narrative employs the repetition of individual shots with movement from left to right and vice versa to visually evoke a criss-crossing movement. (Mennel)

The most evident depiction of this criss-crossing notion presents itself through the mirroring of coffins across the two countries. For example, just as Akin employs the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* to divide *Gegen die Wand* into visible acts, he continues this method in *Auf der anderen Seite* through the theme of death. The dividing of the film into three parts mimics the musical interludes of *Gegen die Wand*, but functions in a less overtly distancing way in the second portion of the trilogy. The three-part structure of *Auf der anderen Seite* draws on traditional Turkish cinema and literature. The tripartite division of storylines in *Auf der anderen Seite* to Ali Özgentürk's *Balalayka*, Yeşim Ustaoğlu's *Journey to the Sun*, Güney Dal's *Europe Street 5*, and Akin's *Im Juli*, Mennel explains:

The return of the dead Turkish body to its homeland is a reoccurring trope in Turkish-German and Turkish cinema and literature... Whereas the dead bodies central to the plots of these texts are transported arduously from one country to another or from one region to another, in *The Edge of Heaven* dead bodies are exchanged via planes and the time and space between the place of death in one country and burial in another is collapsed in one cut (Mennel).



"Yeter's Tod" Figure 8



"Lotte's Tod" Figure 9

In each mirroring scene, a coffin moves on the airplane's conveyer belt, but in opposing directions. The first image is a long shot of a Turkish plane with Yeter's coffin moving to the left, debarking. In the second image, Lotte's coffin moves up the

<sup>10</sup> Source: *The Edge of Heaven*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Baki Davrak, Nursel Kose, Janna Schygulla, and Tuncel Kurtiz. Strand Releasing, 2007. DVD.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

conveyor belt boarding the Turkish airline to Germany. In each chapter, the death which occurs is a result of violence. These deaths cross between cultures, but as they affect people of all cultures, they continue the transnational theme of the trilogy. For example, in “Yeter’s Tod”, the death takes place in Germany, yet its repercussions affect Turkey, creating movement as Nejat ventures to Turkey to find Yeter’s family and make amends for his father’s mistakes. Similarly, Lotte’s death inspires her mother’s ventures to Turkey. The death theme of the trilogy presents itself in mirroring depictions of confined bodies crossing between countries. Another way in which the filmic space crosses borders is through language, as the characters communicate with one another in various languages, including German, Turkish, and English. Such interweaving of language and location serve to further underscore the effects of globalization on German cinema.

Much like *Gegen die Wand*, Akin’s cast in *Auf der anderen Seite* includes Turkish, German, and Turkish-German actors, all of whom were meticulously chosen for fitting within the film’s plot. Akin’s deliberate casting choices represent an art he perfected over time. As Randall Halle suggests of Akin’s 1998 film, *Kurz und schmerzlos*: “Early films of Turkish-German directors like Fatih Akin... suffer because of the limited scale the directors could draw from their untrained cast.... Unfortunately, his actors seldom manage to make their own egos transparent to the characters they play.... Such alienation... creates a low-grade disruption to the spectator” (148). Though *Gegen die Wand* is more refined than *Kurz und schmerzlos*, Halle’s criticism still pertains. Take actor Birol Ünel, for example, who was known for his rebellious antics. Though these characteristics were the reason Akin was

drawn to him, and consequentially, in *Gegen die Wand*, his addictive personality and passion for an excess of drugs and alcohol add to his performance. *Auf der anderen Seite*, on the other hand, reveals more refined casting choices, in large part due to the film's larger budget. This budget gave Akin the opportunity to weigh his options in actors, making for a more diverse and skilled cast. Since *Auf der anderen Seite* was produced following the success of *Gegen die Wand*, Akin was given more creative control to choose a more 'trained' cast. For example, Akin's fixation on finding the perfect actors to portray Sibel and Cahit in *Gegen die Wand* created an unpredictable chemistry between Kekilli and Ünel that relied heavily on their offstage identities. Parallels between actors and characters continue in the casting of *Auf der anderen Seite* in both minor and major ways. This is relevant as their reappearances serve to link the films across the trilogy. For example, the singer in the musical interlude of *Gegen die Wand*, Idil Üner, reappears in *Auf der anderen Seite* as the doctor who gives Ali the news about his father's heart condition. Much like Kekilli and Ünel, Üner also possesses a hyphenated identity as a Turkish-German actress.



Üner in *Gegen die Wand* Figure 10

<sup>12</sup> Source: *Gegen die Wand*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Birol Ünel, Sibel Kekilli, Cem Akin, Strand Releasing 2004. *Amazon*. Web. 25 October 2016.



*Üner in Auf der anderen Seite Figure 11*

In her appearance in *Gegen die Wand*, Üner has no immediate interaction with the characters. Instead, her role is to facilitate the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, her performative contribution increases. She only appears in the *Yeter's Tod* episode, but she performs as a Turkish-German, evident in how she communicates the news of Ali's condition to his son and Yeter in German, while her surname is clearly of Turkish origin. Though the scenes across the two cycles do not mirror one another, Akin's choice to collaborate with the same actors on multiple occasions presents itself for minor characters in the trilogy as well.

Akin develops a method of drawing on actors' real lives in the storyline of *Auf der anderen Seite* similar to that which he employed in *Gegen die Wand*. Akin incorporates the actual experiences of actor Tuncel Kurtiz, yet fictionalizes them through the character of Ali Aksu to critique the stereotypical Turkish masculinity. In "Remixing Film Histories: Fatih Akin and the Creation of a Transnational Film History," Berna Gueneli notes that "In his early career, which began in the 1960s, Kurtiz wrote and directed political satire, acted in and directed theater.... Kurtiz also acted in Turkish political movies that were critical of the government. In the 1970s

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<sup>13</sup> Source: *The Edge of Heaven*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Baki Davrak, Nursel Kose, Janna Schygulla, and Tuncel Kurtiz. Strand Releasing, 2007. DVD.



and 80s, Kurtiz lived in ‘semi-exile’ because of his pieces that were critical of the government” (456). The role of Ali Aksu acts as an homage to Kurtiz’ influence in Young Turkish Cinema, as Gueneli further explains: “This casting of Kurtiz created a connection to his earlier socially critical films from the 1970s. Finally, with his role in *Auf der anderen Seite*, Kurtiz lived an international renaissance that brought him to Cannes in 2007” (457). By choosing to cast Kurtiz, Akin incorporates some of the actor’s autobiographical accounts in the character of Ali. For example, after killing Yeter and spending time in prison, Ali is deported to Turkey upon his release. There he spends the rest of his life in seclusion, living a life of ‘semi-exile.’ In contrast to the blackballing Kurtiz underwent due to the radicalism of his early work, Ali’s return to his home of Trabzon in Turkey is figured as liberation. Though Ali did not have a choice regarding his deportation from Germany, he did make the decision to return to his home on the Black Sea coast once in Turkey.

Filming along the Black Sea coast was inspired by Akin’s own familial past, and the location serves to emphasize the transnational theme of movement, while also drawing upon Turkish tradition. Dimitris Eleftheriotis cites the documentary *Fatih Akin: Diary of a Film Traveller*, in which “Akin explains how an exploratory trip to his grandfather’s village of Camburnu on the Black Sea coast of Turkey, as he was researching locations for the film’s script, helped him clarify the eventual storyline. Because of the trip, Akin rejected what appeared to be his original inspiration... instead he opted for a plot structure that revolves around clearly delineated story strands” (134). Akin’s initial idea to include scenes between Hanna Schygulla and Tunnel Kurtiz transformed into “only a few seconds of screen time during which they

do not even address each other” (Eleftheriotis 134). Foreclosing the possibility of a relationship between Schygulla and Kurtiz resists giving a strictly German or strictly Turkish identity to the film, as is affiliated with the actors themselves and the characters they portray. Once more, Akin’s “double vision” sparked a creative decision to alter the film’s plot.

This change is emphasized in the use of “doubling” within the film, a notion that Barbara Mennel defines as “an organizing principle [which] does not only organize character constellations but also applies to the film’s narrative structure. Repeated individual shots are embedded in parallel time lines. *Auf der anderen Seite* begins with a shot at a gas station—a stopping point that enables mobility—in the Black Sea region, which reappears toward the end of the film” (9-10). Inspired by his own past, Akin frames *Auf der anderen Seite* within the doubled shots of Nejat’s journey towards the Black Sea to reconcile with his father. The sea itself has a multitude of symbolic meanings within *Auf der anderen Seite*, but in the father-son narrative between Nejat and Ali, it serves to divide and to reconcile. Much like Akin, Nejat serves as the protagonist who most embodies this sense of “double vision,” taking on an aura of hybridity as a second generation Turkish-German citizen.

The generational gap between first- and second-generation Turkish-German immigrants is illuminated in the father-son relationship between Ali and Nejat. In her article, “Masculinity and Transnational Paradigms: The Cinema of Fatih Akin,” Muriel Cormican traces the gendered identity of the heteronormative male in Akin’s films, arguing that in *Auf der anderen Seite*, “the film’s two primary representations of masculinity (Ali and Nejat) neither challenge nor threaten traditional

understandings of masculinity. Ali, the working-class, older Turkish immigrant to Germany, understands masculinity to involve toughness and a relationship to women based on conflicting desires to honor, protect, control, and own them” (30). Ali’s exclusivity in choosing to identify as Turkish even while living in Germany is evident in his adamancy about speaking in Turkish to Nejat. Even when Nejat asks him things in German, Ali responds in Turkish.

Initially, Ali’s relationship with Yeter is sparked by his desire to honor and protect his cultural identity, but his patriarchal behavior results in Yeter’s untimely death. Upon their first sexual encounter, Ali first calls her “Jessy,” then Yeter, and finally he calls her “Gül,” the Turkish name for “rose.” What starts out as an endearing nickname for Yeter ultimately becomes a recurring symbol within the film. Ali “saves” Yeter by offering her the comforts of his home and payment for her to be his and his alone. In a sense, Yeter blooms by ceasing to wear wigs and disguises. During dinner with Ali and Nejat she reveals more personal information, describing her husband’s involvement in Turkish politics and her daughter’s circumstances. Once more, Akin subtly incorporates factual accounts within the plot, as “Yeter’s husband was killed in the seventies in Maras. He was possibly a Kurdish political activist. Yeter talks about this incident during her first evening at Ali Aksu’s house. The viewer can infer that Yeter left the country for political and economic reasons after the death of her husband” (Gueneli 457). The dinner scene reveals another reason Ali feels compelled to protect and honor Yeter: Since she no longer has a husband to do so for her, he steps in. However, this results in Yeter’s untimely death, she having gained independence and cultural awareness as a self-made woman after

arriving in Germany. By contrast, Ali seeks to control her, because “masculinity for him is intimately tied to a misogynist heterosexuality, so much so that when he returns from a few days in the hospital, he cannot imagine that his son has not slept with his girlfriend during his absence. Emotionally wrought and attempting to reassert his dominance over, and ownership of, Yeter, Ali accidentally kills her when she resists” (Cormican 30). Following her death, Yeter becomes a catalyst for Nejat, inspiring his move to Turkey to make amends for his father’s mistakes and find Ayten.

In contrast to Ali, who is traditionalist in his approach to sex and gender roles, Nejat finds interest beyond the physical attraction of bodies, in the beauty of art, most notably literature. Cormican’s reading of the father-son pairing is that whereas Ali’s character chooses to assert dominance, “Nejat’s emotional reserve, by contrast, is emphasized in his relationship to the literature to which he has devoted his life and his logical decision to fund Ayten’s education after Ali kills her mother: if his father killed her mother, then he must atone for the sins of the father by trying to replace that mother, at least in deed” (30). Unlike Ali, who, as part of his punishment by the German government, is forced to return to Turkey, where he recoils in the familiarity that was so far away following his emigration, Nejat finds solace in his transnational identity. This is most notable in the second scene to be doubled in the film, in which Nejat is lecturing at the university. During his lecture, he quotes Goethe: “Who wants to see a rose bloom in the depths of winter? Everything to its own time. Leaves, buds, flowers. Only a fool could want this untimely intoxication.” The quote foreshadows Yeter’s death in that Ali brings Yeter to bloom by revealing her most

inner identity, yet does not give her the time to adjust to his staunch masculine expectations. Ali's alcoholism or "untimely intoxication" catalyzes both Yeter's death and the crisscrossing of borders developed in the storyline of her daughter. In essence, Goethe's quote serves to bind a multitude of characters through the symbol of the rose. Mennel notes that:

Gül in *Auf der anderen Seite* becomes a name dislodged from a single character: in addition to being the main character's name in Ozdogan's novel, it is used as a form of endearment by Ali to express thankful recognition of his sexual pleasure to Yeter, then as Ayten's false name in her passport, and finally as Lotte's misguided attempt to protect Ayten by misnaming her... 'Rose' links Gül of the novel, Yeter, and Ayten across time and space highlighting the question about human agency, but the name also leads characters astray with confusing masquerade, global mimicry, and well-intentioned misunderstandings. (Mennel 18-19)

The choice of Nejat as the protagonist who links the rest of the film's characters highlights Akin's fixation on giving the audience the truest version of "double vision." Nejat's identity straddles those of Germany and Turkey, as he finds positives in both cultures. His role is to incorporate the symbols through which all the characters are linked, like the rose imagery. Not only is the rose Ali's nickname for Yeter, but the novel he continues to push his father to read is what allows the two to finally reconcile after such a long time apart.

Akin links the first two films in his trilogy, *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, through themes of violence and mobility. While this violence in *Gegen*

*die Wand* stems from love, inspiring the characters to move from Germany to Turkey, *Auf der anderen Seite* “crisscrosses” cultures. The mobility of *Auf der anderen Seite* retraces routes, evident in the repeated use of parallel and mirrored scenes. This furthers the hybridity of Turkish-German identity, particularly as Akin continues his collaborations with actors of similar hybridic backgrounds that mimic his own “double-vision.” Linguistically, *Auf der anderen Seite* takes a more transnational turn in including English as a language of communication between migrants. Akin continues to delve further into these themes of hybridity and crosscultural movement with his final portion of the trilogy, *The Cut*.

## Chapter 4: *The Cut*

Akin's *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy culminates in an internationally co-produced historical drama entitled *The Cut*, released in 2014. Manifesting its given lot in the trilogy—the devil—the diabolical theme of *The Cut* is the Armenian Genocide. While *The Cut* focuses on one man's journey, Nazaret Manoogian traversing the globe in search of his beloved family, the film's overarching transnational approach reflects the international impact of the genocide. In line with the previous films in the trilogy, *The Cut* includes themes of border crossing and migrant travel. It surpasses the binary Turkish-German linguistic and cultural placement of *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, with five languages and multiple international filming locations. Akin's most ambitious film to date, *The Cut* combined his directorial double-vision with the collaborative contributions of co-producer Karim Debbagh and co-writer Mardik Martin. While these collaborations generated a larger production budget of fifteen million euros (Heyman), the compromises required for realizing this international project can be seen in a loss of Akin's individual artistic vision, especially in plot.

To cater to a larger audience, Akin's typical plot complexities are replaced by predictability, which critics characterize as a recurring shortfall of the film. Nicholas Rapold, for instance, remarks that, "Too many scenes feel routine or clichéd, sometimes even those depicting extreme experiences. Mr. Akin made his name with the dramatic vim and vigor of films like "Head-On," and one can only wish "The Cut" had gone that extra mile" (Rapold). Though *The Cut*'s plot is not typical of Akin's previous directorial style, the film's cinematography and adherence to

historical accuracy in merging factual accounts within an epic storyline are grounded in transnational traits. Both the international production and multicultural content of the film place it within a unique genre of ethnofictional transnational cinema. Akin's hybridized collaborations and casting of actors ultimately create a film rich in cultural detail. While Akin adamantly denies that the film offers a political statement, themes of violence and silence surrounding the Armenian genocide parallel one another to target Turkey's continuous denial of history.

*The Cut* chronicles Nazaret's cross continental journey in search of his lost daughters. Opening in 1915 in southeastern Turkey, the film's protagonist Nazaret Manoogian (Tahar Rahim), an Armenian blacksmith is rounded up by Ottoman soldiers. Forced to leave behind his wife, Rakel (Hindi Zahra) and twin daughters, Arsinée (Zein Fakhoury) and Lucinée (Dina Fakhoury) in Mardin, Nazaret and other Armenian men are marched to their death by Ottoman soldiers. Nazaret, however, survives the organized massacre, as the convict charged with killing him, Mehmet (Bartu Küçükçaglayan), does not fully cut his throat. Instead, the laceration leaves Nazaret unconscious and visibly "dead" to the Ottoman soldiers, allowing him to outlive the massacre. With the aid of Mehmet, Nazaret eventually begins traveling with other survivors. An acquaintance from Mardin informs him that some survivors from the town migrated to Ras al-Ayn. Determined to locate his family, Nazaret faces disappointment and sadness after his only immediate reunion, with his sister-in-law, Ani (Arévik Martirosian), ends with him suffocating her in order to ease her pain. Disillusioned, Nazaret travels onward to Aleppo. There he is given refuge alongside other Armenians by Omar Nasreddin (Makram Khoury), a soap maker. Nazaret's



luck changes in Aleppo as he learns of his daughters' whereabouts. Following leads from other survivors, his journey continues to Lebanon, Cuba, and the swamp country of the southern United States. Finally, Nazaret traces Lucinée's journey from Minnesota to Ruso, North Dakota, where the two reunite almost a decade later.

As a fictional story based on the genocide, *The Cut* uses symbolism through the names of the characters to add depth to the story and foreshadow the plot. For example, the name Nazaret derives from Hebrew, meaning "to branch." Branching correlates with Nazaret's journey, as he branches further and further from his home in search of his family. Christian viewers will come to the immediate association with Nazaret's name with the city where Jesus was born. Known as the Arab capital of Israel, with its religious implications, Nazareth is a pivotal center in Christian pilgrimage as well. As a toponym, Nazaret is a tribal name, used by resettling groups upon return from exile. Just as he ventures around the globe, branching away from Armenia, Nazaret's forced exile exemplifies this topography of resettlement.

Similarly, *The Cut* includes other figures whose names imply underlying meanings and symbolism which foreshadow the plot. For example, the names of Nazaret's immediate family members foreshadow their futures. His wife, Rakel, possesses the Hebrew name for "ewe." An ewe, or a female sheep, is symbolic of innocence. Ewes are delicate and fragile, often representing vulnerable, child-like qualities. This notion exemplifies the figure of Rakel, for she does not survive the harsh experience of the genocide. Rakel dies early on, after Nazaret is taken from his family. Though she is too weak to outlive the atrocities, she becomes a symbol of hope for Nazaret. During his most fragile moments, he clings to memories of Rakel

and remembers her beautiful voice as inspiration to push through and survive. This sentiment carries over into Nazaret's daughters as well. His twin girls, Arsinée and Lucinée, become beacons of hope, as they escape the genocide to make new lives for themselves. Lucinée, Armenian for "moon," is a feminine symbol. The moon represents the rhythm of time, as it cycles along eternally. Though Lucinée does not survive, she is crucial to ensuring Arsinée's survival. The two become a singular entity, as they support one another in their travels of forced exile. In the end, Arsinée survives as Nazaret's only remaining family member. Her name, stemming from the masculine name Arsenois, means "characterized by strengths and energy." Her strengths shine through in a willingness to survive. Though Arsinée suffers from a debilitating handicap and experiences the loss of her twin sister, unaware of Nazaret's survival, she has the energy to continue living. Her hope and strength in the face of tragic incidents provide the audience with a portrayal of female empowerment.

The supporting characters whom Nazaret meets along the way also become mythicized through their names adding depth to the plot. The first man who crosses Nazaret's path on his journey is Mehmet, the man initially tasked with killing him. Mehmet, the Turkish form of Muhammad, is Arabic for "praiseworthy." Unlike the other men who slay their victims with no remorse, Mehmet recognizes the atrocities of the death march and does everything in his power to allow Nazaret the opportunity to survive. Just as Akin took inspiration for the plot from autobiographical accounts, his choice in naming Nazaret's killer and partner in survival Mehmet ties back to religious symbolism. Grigoris Balakian, a survivor of the Armenian genocide recalls in his memoir:

I have never been a believer in fate, always pitying those who hold to it blindly. Muhammad, the Prophet of the Muslims, invented the doctrine of fate to push the Arab populace to war, and he had his Jewish personal secretary write in the Koran:

If it is decided that you shall die on so-and-so day, in so-and-so place, it's the same whether you go to the battlefield or stay home; death will find you.

Therefore, it is better if you go to holy war for religion or jihad and become a martyr by dying. A believer in the doctrine of fate kills, by his own hand, the most powerful inner willpower and drives himself to blind, passive compliance. But whoever believes that where there is a will, there is a way can work miracles and make possible the impossible. (395)

Balakian's interpretation of Muhammad, the Prophet of the Muslims, suggests a religious theme within *The Cut*. While it is Mehmet who has the power to kill Nazaret, he refrains from doing so. Instead, he renders him mute with a fateful cut across his vocal chords. This cut becomes an overarching system within the rest of the film. In a way, Mehmet's actions make him praiseworthy or martyr-like by willing Nazaret to survive.

*The Cut* occupies a unique position within Akin's trilogy. Though few parallels may be found among the settings, plot, and characters of *The Cut* in comparison to the two earlier films, it continues Akin's transnational gaze, extending it beyond the realm of Turkish-German relations. Just as Akin's specific choice of actors for roles in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* was based around a relatable hybridity, his decision to cast Tahar Rahim as Nazaret also follows this

pattern. Reflecting on working with him, Akin notes that, “90 percent of the quality of the film came from Tahar Rahim. When we met, there were a lot of things that we shared. We had relevant backgrounds — he had grown up in France with an Arab background, and I had grown up in Germany with a Turkish background” (Heyman). The casting choice of Rahim demonstrates a transnational turn, with Akin’s scope expanding beyond Germany and Turkey into new cultures.

The film’s production itself is an amalgamation of transnational influences which reveal Akin’s growth as a director beyond the realm of German cinema. For example, Akin partnered with Mardik Martin, an American screenwriter of Armenian descent, to co-write the story together. Martin’s influence upon the plotline represents a departure from Akin’s usual auteurist control of all aspects of the production process. While he explains that, “[his] only family connection with the massacres was through [his] mother’s father, who was killed in defense of [his] family’s village” (Eghiazaryan), as a first-generation migrant, Martin’s journey from the Middle East to America parallels Nazaret’s journey westward. Born in Iran of Armenian descent, Martin grew up in Iraq, but fled to New York to avoid the draft. Reflecting on his decision to partake in the production, following a thirty-four-year hiatus from the industry, Martin explains that “Fatih had a rough of a story, which we used as the main thread to base the script on. My main contribution was making the story simpler, more cinematic, and rewriting the last third in a way which was different than what he had” (Eghiazaryan). *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* leave audiences on the edge of their seats, uncertain of where the characters’ paths will go. In *Gegen die Wand*, as Cahit’s bus takes off (presumably to Mersin), there is still a

sliver of hope that Sibel would follow. Even the uncertainty of where Cahit's bus is heading to leaves the conclusion open-ended. This sense of uncertainty carries over to *Auf der anderen Seite* as well, as Nejat sits on the shoreline of Trabzon awaiting his father's return from fishing. As the credits roll over the ocean waves, no boat appears. Once more, we are left wondering when Ali will return and if the two will reconnect. *The Cut*, on the other hand, gives the audience closure by concluding with Nazaret's reunion with his daughter. In this ending, Nazaret and his child walk side by side through the snow-covered plains of the great American west. A widescreen pan out alludes to the immense journey both faced to get to this point together, while also foreshadowing possible future obstacles. Though they are no longer condemned to solitary lives, Nazaret and his daughter must continue to survive one step at a time.



14

Figure 12

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<sup>14</sup> Source: *The Cut*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Tahar Rahim, Simon Abkarian, Makram Khoury, Bombero International 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 15 January 2017.



Figure 13

The generational differences between Martin and Akin simplified *The Cut*'s plot, leaving a storyline significantly more predictable than those of his other films. This is because Martin's emphasis was on creating a coherent, cohesive tale that would best portray the atrocities of the genocide. Hailing from an elder generation of cinematographers as well, Martin's approach was to simplify the story, allowing for it to be viewed by a larger, international audience. As *The Cut* is a historical piece, Akin needed to work with Martin, because his own background did not give him full access to understanding the Armenian plight. Instead, Martin's own upbringing lends itself to providing a more knowledgeable partnership. This meshing of visions effects a doubling of Akin's "double vision." For much like Akin, Martin's own life stems from a migrant background.

Though the inspiration of *The Cut* stems from history, Akin takes liberties with the plot by fictionalizing the journey of Nazaret. Shot on 35-millimeter film, the motion picture mimics still photography to give audiences realistic images of Nazaret's travels. Akin emphasizes the landscape during Nazaret's epic journey

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<sup>15</sup> Source: *The Edge of Heaven*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Baki Davrak, Nursel Kose, Janna Schygulla, and Tuncel Kurtiz. Strand Releasing, 2007. DVD.

across the globe by framing the deserts, plains, oceans, and urban areas through wide shots.



16

*Figure 14*



17

*Figure 15*

Take these two images, for example. Each shot features a scene of railroad travel, yet in two opposing settings. The top scene is one of Nazaret running to board a train to traverse the desert towards Aleppo, while the bottom scene is of Nazaret working on the transcontinental railroad in the United States. Each image reveals the physical landscape of the setting to give the viewer an accurate depiction of location.

MacDougall points out that with the medium of film, “It is difficult to deny that the prosthetic eye of the camera has an inherent unfair advantage over our pens and

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<sup>16</sup> Source: *The Cut*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Tahar Rahim, Simon Abkarian, Makram Khoury, Bombero International 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 15 January 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

keyboards” (MacDougall, 16). In *The Cut*’s case, this artificial eye is beneficial in providing an accurate depiction of history. To justly portray certain scenes, Akin’s shooting locations differ from the area they depict. For example, some of the scenes set in Turkey were filmed in Jordan. Akin explains that the decision to do so was “because of logistical reasons. The film takes place in 1915, in southeastern Turkey, very close to today’s Syria, actually. And I needed a lot of old trains, historical trains, like the ones from the Baghdad Railway that Germans were building through the Turkish Empire in those days. You find those trains and those landscapes in Jordan” (Heyman). By drawing on this type of visual anthropology, *The Cut* combines documentary and fictional film forms to create an ethnofiction. As David MacDougall argues, “Ethnographic film should take its due place alongside other visual dimensions of the human world—other film genres, most immediately, but also photography and painting, art...and any other manifestations of what, in an older discourse, we used to call ‘material culture’” (MacDougall, 15). In collaborating with Martin, Akin creates a combined artistic gaze to better portray the atrocities of the Armenian genocide with the most historical accuracies.

Once more, like the other films in the trilogy, Akin subtly includes an alternative approach to Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* by framing Charlie Chaplin’s *The Kid* (1921) into the storyline via the inclusion of a film within a film. *The Kid* stars Charlie Chaplin with Jackie Coogan as his adopted son. Widely known as one of the greatest silent films, *The Kid* traces the Tramp’s relationship with an abandoned child who becomes his partner in crime. When spending time in Aleppo, Nazaret attends a screening of *The Kid* alongside other displaced migrants. Sitting in an open



theatre and watching the events transpire on the screen, Nazaret is visibly touched by the message of Chaplin's film.



Figure 16

During the screening on a brick wall in the center of Aleppo, the audience, all varying in background, find unity in watching the silent film. As a silent film, the movie does not need to rely on language to get a message across to the audience. Instead, just as Nazaret has been forced to communicate in other ways, by using his hands and acting things out, he finds solace in Chaplin's humor. This incorporation of historically accurate cinematography adds ethnographic depth to *The Cut*. It sets the period, as the film was released six years after Nazaret was taken from his family. Though there is no factual recording that *The Kid* was screened in Aleppo, such an incident is plausible. This scene allows the viewer to witness a lighter side of life as well, removing them from the visual horrors that the genocide brought upon Nazaret and offering a glimpse into temporary happiness. The film screening also gives Nazaret the inspiration he needs to continue his journey and find his daughters. Much like the

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<sup>18</sup> *The Cut*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Tahar Rahim, Simon Abkarian, Makram Khoury, Bombero International 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 15 January 2017.

other films in the trilogy, this moment returns to Akin's repeated use of a *Verfremdungseffekt*, by framing a film within a film. In this instance, however, Akin does not adhere to the distancing effect, yet uses *The Kid* to have the observer delve further into the plot. Breaking the fourth wall, this scene offers the viewer a hybridic effect that toys with Nazaret's lack of language to communicate. Yet Akin's approach is not to distance the audience from Nazaret's emotions. Instead, he rejects the effect of the technique. Unlike the musical interludes in *Gegen die Wand* that prevent the audience from losing itself completely in the narrative, this is more metanarrative. Having experienced extreme turmoil, Nazaret rarely reveals feeling, as though he is emotionally numb. This cinematic moment creates a bond between the protagonist and audience to better understand the plight of a childless father indeterminately separated from his daughters.

The use of language in *The Cut* embraces transnationalism, with the inclusion of multiple languages. *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* rely heavily on Turkish-German exchanges, with the addition of English in the latter film. *The Cut*, on the other hand, includes Arabic, Armenian, Spanish, and Turkish, with no precise language reigning over the other. Through subtitles, English ultimately serves as the film's primary language. Akin explains his reasoning behind the inclusion of so much English:

The main reason is that if I wanted to control the film, I had to control the dialogue. And I don't speak Armenian at all. There are a lot of examples in the history of cinema. Bertolucci shot "The Last Emperor" with the Chinese speaking English. I used the concept that Polanski used in "The Pianist,"

where he made all the Polish characters speak English and the Germans speak German, making English a language of identification. It's a clear concept, but it's surprising for some people because they're used to my films in German and Turkish. But this film is more about the whole world. It's not set in a minimalistic frame. (Heyman)

Interestingly, the Turkish characters speak Turkish in *The Cut*. This relates back to Akin's other works, where he uses language to target the audience. On the surface, the choice to keep Turkish is defended by the practicality of his argument, however, there is deeper meaning rooted in this. Audiences of other backgrounds are reliant on the subtitles to better understand the plot, yet Turkish viewers overcome this obstacle to focus directly on the images on screen. This is particularly important from a political point of view, considering the Turkish tendency to deny the Armenian genocide. While *The Cut* appeals to transnational audiences through the use of English, its inclusion of Turkish introduces a specific national-cultural dimension into the film.

Just as *The Cut* follows Nazaret's international journey, it is a journey of directorial growth for Akin in becoming a transnational director. Akin cites Elia Kazan, Sergio Leone, Martin Scorsese, Terrence Malick, Bertolucci, and Eastwood (Heyman) as directors who inspired his filmmaking. Indeed, the film format and cinematography combines their directorial influences in adapting a western-like style to the topic of the Armenian Genocide. For example, Akin explains that, "The film deals also a lot with [my] admiration for Bertolucci, and Italian westerns and how Eastwood adapted Italian westerns... So this film is very much in the Atlantic ocean,

somewhere near the Azores — for a European film it's too American, for an American film it's too European" (Heyman). Much like Akin's own hyphenated status as a Turkish-German, *The Cut* does not fall under a specific category of film. Instead, it is a work of transnational cinema.

Prevalent recurring themes of violence, repeated in the first two films of the *Love, Death, and the Devil* trilogy recur in *The Cut*. The final film is an epic tale of migration and exile, surpassing the journeys depicted in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite*, for Nazaret will never return to his home. Instead, his forced migration requires him to take residence in a new space. This is foreshadowed in his continual journey westward, taking various modes of transportation to move. As it is the third and final film of the trilogy, Akin incorporates love and death as the main reasons behind Nazaret's migration. His love for his daughters and wife are the things that keep him going in the face of human evil and hopelessness. The determination to overcome death pushes him further and further away from his Armenian roots. Yet, the Devil itself takes hold in the images and portrayal of the genocide itself. One of the most horrific scenes in the entire film is when Nazaret makes it to Ras al-Ayn. Walking through the refugee camp of starving, helpless refugees, begging "Take me out of here, I'll do anything," Nazaret is numb to their pain. The truly diabolical theme presents itself in the starvation, hunger, and death projected in Ras al-Ayn.



19

Figure 17



20

Figure 18

In the top image, Akin emphasizes the desert-like beige color that conceals the Ras al-Ayn camp. The camp itself is a visual representation of hopelessness, bodies of living and dead displaced Armenians are indistinguishable. Through the desert-like color scheme and beige imagery, the individual refugees all blend together. Feelings of hopelessness and sadness are reflected through the wide-angle shot and the deteriorated blankets, shelters, and clothes worn by the survivors. While wandering through the camp, however, Nazaret discovers his sister-in-law, Ani. When finding her sitting amongst the other refugees in the camp, Nazaret does everything in his power to ease her pain. However, she can no longer fight for her own life, begging him to free her, saying “God is not merciful.” After spending the entire day together,

<sup>19</sup> *The Cut*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Tahar Rahim, Simon Abkarian, Makram Khoury, Bombero International 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 15 January 2017. Figure 17.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*. Figure 18.

Nazaret and Ani are centered by the pink light of the sunset, he holds her in “in his lap, looking like a reverse Pieta in which Jesus holds Mary” (Weissberg) at dusk, depicted in the bottom image above. Finally, to end her suffering, Nazaret does the only thing he can, suffocating her in a mercy killing that fulfills her wishes: “Brother-in-law, end my suffering.” It is in this pivotal scene, in which the only way Nazaret can aid is by ending life, that Akin is able to fully capture the desecration of the genocide. The lighting in this scene opposes the colorless scene of Ras al-Ayn at first. It ends in a pink framed light, as Nazaret’s short-lived reunion with his sister-in-law compels his onward journey.

Like the crisscrossing scenes in *Auf der anderen Seite*, there are two pivotal scenes in *The Cut* that portray parallel images of dark violence against women, linking it as a theme across the trilogy. First, there is a scene during Nazaret’s death march where a woman is taken from her children to be raped. Unable to aid her, Nazaret and the other men rounded up by the Ottoman guards are forced to look on as the rape occurs. A rape almost recurs, after Nazaret has made it to America. Initially, the first rape incident adheres to the historical events affiliated with the genocide. Published by the British parliament in 1916, the Bryce/Toynbee Blue Book formally known as *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916*, is one of the most influential sources on the Armenian genocide. Anrold Toynbee and Viscount James Bryce chronicled survivors of the Armenian genocide and witnesses from around the world. In this “Blue Book” multiple accounts of rape were recorded. According to an informant from Moush, “All the old women and the ones who were unable to walk were killed. There were about one hundred Kurdish guards over us,

and our lives depended on their pleasure. It was a very common thing for them to rape our girls in our presence. Very often they violated eight- or ten-year-old girls, and consequently many would be unable to walk, and were shot” (qtd. in Miller 228). This depiction of sexual violence in the beginning of the film is traced to the factual atrocities survivors truly experienced. It exposes a feeling of helplessness, as Nazaret and the other male prisoners can only stand by and watch as a woman is assaulted only meters away from them:



Figure 19



Figure 20

In the above image, the mother who is being assaulted by the guards disappears into a cloud of dust as she yells for her young child to run away. Even after urging the guards to “stop those bandits,” the Ottoman guard on horseback raises his gun to the

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<sup>21</sup> *The Cut*. Dir. Fatih Akin. Perf. Tahar Rahim, Simon Abkarian, Makram Khoury, Bombero International 2014. *Netflix*. Web. 15 January 2017. Figure 19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*. Figure 20.

displaced men and orders them to get back to work. The framing of the desert scene in both images uses the desert setting to further the isolation of the refugees' predicament. With no other sign of life for miles in the background, the immediate surroundings are the only place for the characters to retreat to. Yet even as the woman being violated is only yards from where the Armenian men are working, Nazaret and his companions are immobilized, unable to put an end to the violence inflicted upon the woman.

Akin's vision takes this theme of violence one step further, by showing the audience that sexual atrocities permeate globally. For example, towards the end of *The Cut*, while working on the railroad alongside other migrant, Nazaret once more witnesses an American Indian woman being assaulted by railroad workers. As these are his current coworkers, and Nazaret is more of an equal with no risk of being shot by a surveying guard, he stands up for the young woman, fending off their sexual advances to give her a chance to escape the sexual violence and run away. In this parallel to the earlier scene, as war has passed and he is no longer at the end of a rifle with impending death to prevent him, Nazaret's faces the wrongs of sexual violence and stands against the offenders to defend a woman he does not know. Reintroducing the theme of violence against women links all three films of the trilogy. This theme reappears across the trilogy, like Sibel's rape in *Gegen die Wand*. Though *Gegen die Wand* calls out rape culture in Germany and Turkey, *The Cut* frames sexual violence as a global issue. Rape and sexual violence are not simply an Eastern or Western phenomenon, rather they can occur in any location and are not dependent on ethnicity



or social status. Akin does this through his paralleling of scenes to call into question violence against women.

Though linked by themes and the recurrence of violence, *The Cut* represents a newness to Akin's directorial style compared to the previous films. Considering the locations in which *The Cut* was filmed, Akin reflects that "It's a road movie... The Armenian genocide wasn't only about violence, it was also about forced migration, the spreading around the world of these people, from Anatolia to Port Said, Egypt; to Havana; to Canada; to California; to Hong Kong" (Heyman). Stylistically, *The Cut* is an immense leap in Akin's oeuvre. His increase in production value allowed the project to expand internationally and reveal his impeccable gaze through panned-out long shots that fully capture the world-historic nature of upheaval. Unlike any of his other films, Akin took cinematic risks as a director. First, by working alongside a co-writer and co-producer, he stripped himself of full creative freedom. This is evident in a loss of creativity in *The Cut*'s plot, for the epic journey of Nazaret is filled with predictability and clichés. However, teaming together with Mardik Martin duplicates Akin's personal double vision, for the two pooled their unique hyphenated backgrounds to create a film depicting historical events with relative factual accuracy. The trilogy is linked by Akin's continuous use of parallelism through transcontinental travel to project themes of transnationalism. In focusing on forced migration, the overarching message of *The Cut* resonates as a Heimat film, showing that Heimat is not limited by physical space. Instead, it can be carried across borders through identity. Though Nazaret does not return to Armenia, his culture remains with him. In reuniting with his only surviving daughter and resettling in the American Midwest, he

salvages a fragment of the cultural space of Armenia. Lastly, *The Cut*'s artistic liberties and cinematography form the visual parameters of its ethnography, a new genre in Akin's vast cinematic repertoire. *The Cut* draws on real life accounts to form the fictional epic of Nazaret's transnational journey. As MacDougall writes, "Ethnographic films do not simply traverse social boundaries... they also *transcend* them. And in so doing, they call them into question" (MacDougall 19). The events that transpired during and after the mass murder of Armenians are diabolical, yet the family reunification at the conclusion of the film offers hope for the audience.

Overall, Akin's double vision as a hyphenated Turkish-German director is no longer the driving focus of *The Cut*. Instead, he has surpassed a hybridic portrayal of culture and targeted themes of transnationalism by using the international migration through the diaspora of the genocide. His choice to incorporate languages beyond his native Turkish and German tongues foreshadows his yearning to be respected on a sphere beyond German or European cinema. Instead, he is breaking ground in the genre of transnational cinema, allowing for a wider range of audiences to experience his visions.

## Chapter 5: *Love, Death, and the Devil*

From the single movement of leaving Germany for Turkey in *Gegen die Wand*, *Auf der anderen Seite* escalates to a back-and-forth “crisscrossing” between the two countries, while *The Cut* moves beyond the limitations of German culture and identity to delve into a global journey across international borders. In the end, the production of *The Cut* becomes Akin’s most complex film. The use of language multiplies, while focusing on English as the target language of communication appeals to a specifically international audience.

Together, the *Love, Death, and the Devil* films link with one another through overarching themes. From the self-destructive affair between Sibel and Cahit to the multi-generational relationships between the linked families of *Auf der anderen Seite* to a father’s transatlantic journey in search of his children, love presents itself in each plot. Death also persists across all three films as a catalyst of cross-country journeys. Sparked by jealous rage, Cahit’s killing of his friend influences Sibel’s move to Istanbul. In *Auf der anderen Seite*, mirrored movement between Germany and Turkey stems from death. The deaths of Lotte and Yeter force relatives and loved ones to travel back and forth between their homes. While these travels are triggered by tragic incidents of untimely deaths, they allow familial relationships to heal through forgiveness (like between Ali and Nejat), but also form new and unexpected relationships as well (like between Susanne and Ayten). Lastly, the tail end of the trilogy, *The Cut*, includes connections to *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* via the inclusion of tropes of love and death. These allusions are furthered by the film’s context, for the devil resonates through the imagery of the Armenian genocide.

It is deathly incidents of mass murder which separate Nazaret from his kin, but an undying love for his family motivates him to continue pushing forward. Each cinematic journey unfolds to reveal narratives of movement to unfamiliar and new environments. The theme of violence, particularly violence against women, permeates across each plotline, once more connecting the varying plots. While these instances of assault occur within specific cultural contexts, each instance is different per film to show violence as a transnational discourse as it reappears in different political, cultural, and historical contexts.

Beyond the obvious tropes of love and death, Akin's hybridic gaze links the trilogy through "double vision" and movement. Though it is arguable that the first two films focus heavily on Turkish and German cultural specificities, each finds a home in the transnational film genre. Eleftheriotis concludes, "Considering films as travelling cultural products raises crucial questions in relation to key political, critical and historiographical discourses and practices. Conventional international histories privilege certain flows of import/export that represent only a small number of the journeys involved in the global migration of film" (Eleftheriotis 163). This textual and cultural transformation in *Gegen die Wand* and *Auf der anderen Seite* presents itself specifically through a Turkish-German lens, particularly in the hybrid identities of the actors and the settings in which they find themselves. Yet, while the journeys limit themselves to the two cultures which make-up Akin's individual identity, the overarching messages transcend national cinema. Akin uses these specific German-Turkish stories and places them within a transnational discourse, as the journeys expose occurrences that resonate amongst other cultures. Taken together, all three

films traverse the realm of national cinema, by giving the audience poignant portrayals of day-to-day challenges faced by displaced migrants.

In an interview following the release of *The Cut*, Akin reflects on the trilogy, stating: “Love,’ ‘Death’ and ‘Devil’ are three films that are my personal laboratory to understand the human being. But I’m afraid three films are not enough to understand the human factor” (Anderson). This personal understanding becomes evident in how Akin places his own background into the context of each plot. While this may be most evident in *Gegen die Wand*, as it draws inspiration from an autobiographical experience, Akin emphasizes working with actors who embrace dual backgrounds like his own. Akin’s choice of actors and characters works together across all three films to illustrate a parable of good and bad, showcasing the suffering and perseverance affiliated with displacement. His body of work forms a transnational collection of tales that reveal characters moving to new locations in which they are given a space for the creation of personal change. These new spaces challenge the traditional definition of a Heimat film, as the figures carry their identities with them to form hybridic spaces. Whether their decisions result in positive or negative transformations, Akin’s personal “double-vision” creates a unique directorial gaze that challenges a transnational audience to better understand the journeys as human, particularly when battling their passions and demons in an ever-increasing international world.

Though the trilogy was in the works for a decade, its relevance today should not go ignored. Considering the crisis today, with millions of migrants and refugees crossing into Europe, Akin’s films provide audiences with realistic portrayals of the

experiences and struggles of displaced people seeking asylum. The international journey in *The Cut* serves as a harrowing reminder of the violence that occurs in times of genocide, particularly considering the Canaan-like town of Aleppo, a sanctuary to the protagonist, that now lies in ruins because of the war in Syria. As overarching themes of good and evil resonate with international crises, the make-up of the trilogy serves as a reminder that space continues to grow transnationally and asks audiences to reflect upon the fragility and malleability of nations, borders, and home.

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